BODY AND SPACE FOR EVASION IN THE THEATRE OF SAMUEL BECKETT

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Abstract

Stuck between an impossible life and an inadmissible death and condemned to suffer from their empty existence, the wretched protagonists in Samuel Beckett's theatrical work desperately seek an escape in a symbolic and metaphorical body and space: a foetus in the uterus. Aroused by the nostalgia for mother, they constantly strive to create or live in the conditions analogous to those in the womb: the world absent of excitements, dark, and protective where their idle bodies can curl up serenely in the intermediary state of non-life and non-death until the desired end actually comes.

Introduction

The existential tragedy of Beckettian characters lies in their unalterable fate of being strangers to the world and especially to their selves[2], presaged so precociously by their spiritual ancestor, Victor, in the first play of the author, *Eleutheria*. Probably, this inherent anguish finds its origin in their "empty bodies" due to the "abortion" of their birth. Before going further, it may be appropriate to pay special attention to Pozzo's meditative speech about time in *Waiting for Godot*, which reveals a cynical point of view toward life and birth and which constitutes a prelude to the inner crisis within Beckettian protagonists**:**

> POZZO: [suddenly furious.] Have you not done tormenting me with your accursed time! It's abominable! When! When! One day, is that not enough for you, one day he went dumb, one day I went blind, one day we'll go deaf, one day we were born, one day we shall die, the same day, the same second, is that not enough for you? [Calmer.] They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more. (Beckett 1986: 83)

If, on spiritual level, their mothers "give birth astride of a grave", how can these "stillborn" children then live this inconceivable life? While continuing to live, they are thus no different from itinerant corpses whose selves have already been put in crisis. The long meditation by M. Krap in *Eleutheria* shows us explicitly the regret at having been born—a theme well posed and frequently explored since the author's first attempts in the theatre:

> **M. Krap** (*pedantically*) The mistake is to want to live. It isn't possible. There is nothing to live on in the life we have been lent. […] It's a question of materials. Either there are too many and we don't know where to start, or there are too few and there's no point in starting. But we do nevertheless start, because

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[2] **Victor** […] I have always wanted to be free. I don't know why. Nor do I know what it means, to be free. […] I have always desired it. I still desire it. That is all I desire. At first I was a prisoner of other people. So I left them. Then I was a prisoner of myself. That was worse. So I left myself. (147).

> we're afraid of doing nothing. We sometimes even believe we are finishing, that does happen. And then we see it was only bluff. So we start again, with the too many and the too few. Why can't we be satisfied with a life that is only bluff? It must be because of its divine origin. People tell you that that's what life is, starting and re-starting. It isn't, though, it's merely the fear of doing nothing. Life isn't possible. […] I would have wanted to be contented, just for a moment. […] With having been born, with not yet being dead. (Beckett 1996: 51-52)

This speech finds resonance in the famous sentence by Hamm in *Endgame*: "The end is in the beginning and yet you go on" (Beckett 1986: 126). An attempt to live, to continue, leads inevitably to a daily ritual damned to inertia and silence and ultimately results in a predestined failure. For the stillborn beings whose life is impossible and death unfeasible, a single salutary solution between these two extremes is a return to the intermediary state of non-life and non-death, to the primitive state before their "birth" that will be their "death", in other words to the state of another symbolic and metaphorical body and space, a foetus in the uterus.

This idea is well transmitted in *Breath*, a minuscule play that lasts less than a minute. After a moment of darkness following the rise of the curtains, weak light reveals a scene cluttered with indeterminable trash. The silence is then interrupted by a faint cry, followed abruptly by an amplified inhalation, accompanied by a progressive increase of light. At last, there is an exhalation and the intensity of the light fades gradually, followed by the same cry, before the return to silence and obscurity as the curtain falls. Lasting no more than the time of a respiration, as suggested by the title *Breath*, symbolizing "life", the cry that the author designates as an "[i]nstant of recorded vagitus" (Beckett 1986: 371) infallibly evokes a newborn child's wail, as the infant emerges from the protective shadow and silent shelter of the maternal womb into the light of the day. Almost simultaneously the infant sees death closely, his own, suggested by the darkness after a short instant of light—a perfect scenic realization of the retort by Pozzo mentioned above. The expired bodies of the Beckettian characters, represented here as invisible, are put into the world in a pile of rubbish described as "no verticals, all scattered and lying" (Beckett 1986: 371), an ideal metaphor for a universe of chaos which suits "*all that fall*" (one of Beckett's play titles); yet they do not distinguish themselves from rotting human trash. The play ends in a reconstruction of the initial state, an inverse sequence of actions to the prenatal state: identical cry, silence, and darkness. Moreover, the darkness here can be associated not only with death, "eternal rest", but also with sleep, "provisional rest" in an intrauterine state, from a psychoanalytic point of view suggested by Sigmund Freud:

> Le sommeil est un état dans lequel le dormeur ne veut rien savoir du monde extérieur, dans lequel son intérêt se trouve tout à fait détaché de ce monde. […] Par rapport à ce monde dans lequel nous sommes venus sans le vouloir, nous nous trouvons dans une situation telle que nous ne pouvons pas le supporter d'une façon ininterrompue. Aussi nous replongeons-nous de temps à

> autre dans l'état où nous nous trouvions avant de venir au monde, lors de notre existence intra-utérine. Nous nous créons du moins des conditions tout à fait analogues à celles de cette existence: chaleur, obscurité, absence d'excitations. Certains d'entre nous se roulent en outre en boule et donnent à leur corps, pendant le sommeil, une attitude analogue à celle qu'il avait dans les flancs de la mère. […] Chaque réveil matinal est pour nous, dans ces conditions, comme une nouvelle naissance. Ne disons-nous pas de l'état dans lequel nous nous trouvons en sortant du sommeil: nous sommes comme des nouveau-nés? Ce disant, nous nous faisons sans doute une idée très fausse de la sensation générale du nouveau-né. Il est plutôt à supposer que celui-ci se sent très mal à son aise. Nous disons également de la naissance: voir la lumière du jour[3]. (Freud 2005: 97–98)

Hence, the return to darkness at the end of *Breath* can evoke either the end of a life or the end of a day and inversely, the light of day, birth or an awakening, the (re)commencement of life. In any case, for Beckettian characters, "to see the light of day" seems very painful for children who are born unwillingly and still carry the memory of the mother's womb to which they want to return.

Now, it goes without saying that the "mother", in all traditions and under a broad multiplicity of aspects, has an ambivalent value: from the "virgin mother" to the "infamous mother", from the benevolent and attractive mother to the terrifying and indifferent mother. The "mother" can thus symbolize not only "life" but also "death": birth—egress of the matrix; death—return to the earth mother, as in the conclusion to Nadia Julien (Julien 1989: 223-224). As we will see subsequently, the aborted children in Beckett's theatrical universe are either welcomed or rejected by the two-faced mother, as they try desperately to return to their intrauterine existence. The first condition analogous to this natal state is a return to idleness and an escape into a dreamlike world which encompasses the image of the mother, and especially the image of the womb.

I. Idle Body and Dreamlike World

The newborns tragically dead on the spot, notably in the first Beckettian plays, are obliged to leave their sleep to accomplish their day-to-day activities: Victor in

[3] Sleep is a state in which the sleeping person wants to know nothing of the exterior world, in which his interest is completely detached from this world. […] In comparison with the world into which we came without wanting to, we are in a position we cannot bear in a sustained manner. Also we plunge back from time to time into the state where we were located before coming to the world, back to the time of our intrauterine existence. We create for ourselves the conditions completely analogous to that of this existence: warmth, darkness, the absence of excitement. In addition, some of us curl ourselves up into a ball and turn our body, while we are sleeping, into a position analogous to that it had in the womb. […] In this sense, we are reborn every time we awake in the morning. Aren't we telling ourselves that when we are in the state of awakening from sleep, we are like the newly born? That said, we are forming quite the wrong idea of what it's like to be a newborn. It is more realistic to suppose that one might feel very uncomfortable. Just as we speak of birth: to see the light of day.

Eleutheria is awakened daily by the glazier; Winnie in *Happy Days* by the strident ringing of a bell; A and B in *Act without Words II* by the goad inciting them without respite to get out of the sack—a concrete metaphor of the maternal womb; Hamm, Nagg and Nell in *Endgame* by Clov, to cite only some examples. In the latter case, without mentioning the fact that the "white linen", the "canvas" or the "fabric" are generally female symbols in psychoanalytic terms according to Freud (Freud 2005: 186), the "white sheet" that hides in the protective shadow the three idle bodies, wallowing additionally in the hollow (matrix[4]) of an armchair on castors (Hamm) and ashbins (Nagg and Nell), creates perfectly a foetal state in the uterus. Under this aspect, as soon as Clov removes the sheet, he causes to be born the three newborns that will see the light of day.

Since the day or life is so painful, indeed impossible, the stillborn beings have to recover as soon and as often as possible this state of unconsciousness and provisional happiness, like an intrauterine state procured by sleep. For this reason, Estragon—who throughout the play lets himself be governed by idleness—expresses early in the play his regret at having come into the world:

> VLADIMIR: Suppose we repented.
> ESTRAGON: Repented what?
> VLADIMIR: Oh . . . [*He reflects.*] We wouldn't have to go into the details.
> ESTRAGON: Our being born? (Beckett 1986: 13)

As soon as Estragon stops an activity, he falls immediately asleep and begins to dream. In addition, although his dreams invariably turn into nightmares, he never misses an opportunity to fall asleep again. While trying to help Pozzo get up in Act II, he also falls and then experiences great difficulty leaving the earth:

> ESTRAGON: Sweet mother earth!
> VLADIMIR: Can you get up?
> ESTRAGON: I don't know.
> VLADIMIR: Try.
> ESTRAGON: Not now, not now.
> [*Silence.*]
> […]
> ESTRAGON: What about a little snooze?
> VLADIMIR: Did you hear him [Pozzo]? He wants to know what happened!
> ESTRAGON: Don't mind him. Sleep.
> [*Silence.*]
> POZZO: Pity! Pity!
> ESTRAGON: (with a start). What is it?
> VLADIMIR: Were you asleep?
> ESTRAGON: I must have been. (Beckett 1986: 77)

For these "born-exhausted" children, lying down is naturally easier and more pleasant than holding themselves upright, especially for Vladimir and Estragon who tend to fall on every occasion. Now, let us recall briefly that the "earth", at the origin of any life, is the symbol of the "universal

[4] Freud explains the meaning of the word "matrix" in his *Introduction à la psychanalyse* (*Introduction to psychoanalysis*): « L'appareil génital de la femme est représenté symboliquement par tous les objets dont la caractéristique consiste en ce qu'ils circonscrivent une cavité dans laquelle quelque chose peut être logé » (184). ("The genital device of the woman is symbolically represented by all objects of which the characteristic consists of circumscribing a cavity in which something can be lodged".)

Mother", according to Julien (Julien 1989: 400); it is obvious that "to sleep on the ground" constitutes for Estragon a condition favorable to the return to an intrauterine existence, particularly when he habitually resumes in sleep the posture of the foetal body: "He [*Estragon*] sits down on the mound and tries to take off his boot. But he soon desists and disposes himself for sleep, his arms on his knees and his head on his arms" (Beckett 1986: 82).

This position of the foetus in the maternal womb taken generally by Estragon is once specified as such by the author himself in his stage direction: "He resumes his foetal posture, his head between his knees" (Beckett 1986: 65). Besides, his sleep is somewhat tranquil under the protection of Vladimir who assumes with tenderness a maternal function from time to time: after singing a lullaby to Estragon, Vladimir covers his shoulders with his own jacket and does not hesitate to hold him in his arms to calm him as soon as the nightmare awakens his "child" (Beckett 1986: 65–66).

Similarly, virtually at the beginning of *Endgame*, having just woken up, Hamm withdraws from the exterior life and aspires precociously to sleep: "God, I'm tired, I'd be better off in bed" (Beckett 1986: 93) and next "Get me ready, I'm going to bed" (Beckett 1986: 93–94). Later, this child, who was born unwillingly, abruptly cuts the habitual conversation of Nagg and Nell in order to demand silence: "Quiet, quiet, you're keeping me awake" (Beckett 1986: 100). Nagg, in his turn, accuses his son of having roused him from sleep to listen to his cries or his story: "I was asleep, as happy as a king, and you woke me up to have me listen to you" (Beckett 1986: 119).

In addition, eaten by the devouring earth and exposed without protection to the intolerable light of day, like a child rejected by her cruel mother, Winnie in *Happy Days*, aspires impatiently to the sacred moment of sleep: "Ah well, not long now, Winnie, can't be long now, until the bell for sleep. [*Pause.*] Then you may close your eyes, then you *must* close your eyes—and keep them closed" (Beckett 1986: 165).

Nevertheless, this relief, physical as well as moral, will be denied in Act II since the piercing bell will ring every time she closes her eyes. Blessed on the other hand by the mother, Willie falls asleep safe from the clarity of the day in the dark and protective cave, also a symbol of the womb by its form and its nature as a "matrix". However, his sleep is often interrupted by Winnie, who needs to be perceived by another human being, just as Estragon is prevented from sleeping by Vladimir, and Nagg and Nell by their son Hamm. This interim rest allows the stillborn beings to escape their existential suffering via the dream, or via the wandering of thought, particularly when the dreamt world, a space for evasion, restores them to a state before the beginning of the impossible life.

One of the images evoked most frequently by the stillborn beings in the Beckettian universe is "water", which is regularly associated with evasion and happiness—an imaginary escape to a less suffering state—especially for those who have mobility difficulties; as Michèle Foucré remarks, the fluidity of water facilitating all movements is closely linked to the dream of happiness (Foucré 1970: 88).

Now, the aquatic space under its various forms—sea, lake, river, canal, etc.—alludes also to the "original waters" of existence, to the serous liquid in which the foetus bathes: as everyone knows, it is in water that we are born and from which life arose; water is thus associated with birth. More theoretically, Freud explains the relation between water and birth from a psychoanalytic point of view:

> La naissance se trouve régulièrement exprimée dans le rêve par l'intervention de l'eau : on se plonge dans l'eau ou on sort de l'eau, ce qui veut dire qu'on enfante ou qu'on naît. Or, n'oubliez pas que ce symbole peut être considéré comme se rattachant doublement à la vérité transformiste : d'une part (et c'est un fait très reculé dans le temps), tous les mammifères terrestres, y compris les ancêtres de l'homme, descendent d'animaux aquatiques ; d'autre part, chaque mammifère, chaque homme passe la première phase de son existence dans l'eau, c'est-à-dire que son existence embryonnaire se passe dans le liquide placentaire de l'utérus de sa mère, et naître signifie pour lui sortir de l'eau[5]. (Freud 2005: 189)

Sensual, tepid, and milky, water, and especially the "sea"[6], fertilizes, nourishes, and lulls, like a "mother". Water thus conveys happiness for the Beckettian characters not only because it facilitates their mobility, but also because it calms their nostalgia for the mother.

First, in *Waiting for Godot*, Estragon evokes his memory of "the Dead Sea" on the maps of the Holy Land: "The Dead Sea was pale blue. The very look of it made me thirsty. That's where we'll go, I used to say, that's where we'll go for our honeymoon. We'll swim. We'll be happy" (Beckett 1986: 13).

Like a foetus bathing in the amniotic liquid of the uterus, Estragon expresses the voluptuous pleasure of swimming (water caresses him) and carnal union, suggested by the honeymoon in the Dead Sea[7]. More to the point, "dead" (or "dormant") and unfathomable water is, according to Gaston Bachelard, at the same time the medium of death and the symbol of total sleep (Bachelard 1942: 91).

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[5] Birth is regularly expressed in the dream by the intervention of water: one dives in water or one gets out of water, which means that one gives birth or that one is born. Now, remember that this symbol can be considered as doubly relating to the transformed truth: on one hand (and it is a fact very remote in time), all earthly mammals, including the ancestors of man, descend from water animals; on the other hand, every mammal, every man passed the first phase of his existence in water, that is to say that his embryonic existence takes place in the placental liquid of the uterus of his mother, and to be born means to him to go out of the water.

[6] Nevertheless, as mentioned earlier, the "mother" always keeps an ambivalent value, the "sea", by its devouring character, sometimes ferocious and stormy, can equally symbolize death, a point we will develop subsequently.

[7] The Dead Sea, a saltwater lake in the Near East, owns its name to the fact that macroscopic organisms cannot exist in the high salinity. The choice of the lake by the author is probably not a chance: the water of the Dead Sea is salty and associated with the mother, and it is in this salty water that Estragon wants to swim, which brings us an idea that Estragon compares himself to a foetus which bathes in the salty amniotic liquid of the maternal womb. Despite that, it does not mean that water must be salty to symbolize the uterine liquid.

Thus, while evoking this sensual pleasure in the stagnant water of this lake, Estragon expresses symbolically his fondness for both death and sleep, for the state of unconsciousness of a foetus in the womb.

In *Endgame*, dreams of evasion and reminiscences of happiness are likewise associated with water, especially with the static water of the lake. Nell recalls the happy moments of her promenade on the lake with Nagg, her fiancé at the time: "It was on Lake Como. [Pause.] One April afternoon. [...] It was deep, deep. And you could see down to the bottom. So white. So clean" (Beckett 1986: 102).

Even after an instant of this reminiscence, Nell, still in her dream world, continues to repeat, "You could see down to the bottom." and a little later "So white" (Beckett 1986: 103). This obsession with the image of this deep or bottomless lake where one "could see down to the bottom" corresponds ironically to her deep sleep and her apparent, albeit hypothetical[8], death at the bottom of her ashbin—here again one would say in the matrix, dark, protective, silent, out of sight, and especially hollow so that a foetus Nell can curl up inside.

Along those lines, Hamm in the same piece is very attracted to the idea of evasion in the sea: "Let's go from here, the two of us! South! You can make a raft and the currents will carry us away, far away, to other... mammals!" (Beckett 1986: 108) For Hamm suffering from paraplegia, the sea currents not only facilitate his mobility, abolish all his efforts, but also provide him with sensual pleasure and allow him to relive his romantic adventures: the sea lulls, caresses, and especially, with its milky waves, reminds him of the white maternal milk. It is doubtless for this reason that Hamm chooses among other words "mammals" to express the notion of "living beings". Etymologically, the word "mammal" is derived from the Latin *mamma* (breast) cognating with *mamma* (mother); therefore, for Hamm, the "water" connotatively takes us towards the "mothers" and that explains why this disabled old man is obsessed with the dream of water.

In other plays, scenes of a Beckettian couple's memories of love happen repeatedly in quite restless water most often of a lake. A long beautiful erotic passage of the tape entitled "Farewell to love" in *Krapp's Last Tape* reveals a close link between carnal love and maternal love:

> — upper lake, with the punt, bathed off the bank, then pushed out into the stream and drifted. She lay stretched out on the floorboards with her hands under her head and her eyes closed. Sun blazing down, bit of a breeze, water nice and lively. I noticed a scratch on her thigh and asked her how she came by it. Picking gooseberries, she said. I said again I thought it was hopeless and no good going on, and she agreed, without opening her eyes. [*Pause.*] I asked her to look at me and after a few moments—[*Pause.*]—after a few moments she did, but the eyes just slits, because of the glare. I bent over her to get them in the shadow and they opened. [*Pause. Low.*] Let me in. [*Pause.*] We drifted in among the flags and stuck. The way they

[8] Nagg knocks on the lid of Nell's bin without response. We will never know if she sleeps profoundly or is already dead inside. (120)

> went down, sighing, before the stem! [*Pause.*] I lay down across her with my face in her breasts and my hand on her. We lay there without moving. But under us all moved, and moved us, gently, up and down, and from side to side. (Beckett 1986: 221)

Krapp decides to relinquish his carnal love in order to sacrifice himself to the ideal of his writing career. Now, this "farewell to love" ends symbolically by a last "sexual union" suggested by *four signs*, which we will examine in detail: the communion of eyes, the voice of breath, the warmth of touch, and at last the rhythmic sway.

First, the passive and sensual pose of his lover, lying down, arms raised and eyes closed, as well as the scratch on her thigh, already prepares the mood of the future erotic scene. The "penetration" of Krapp in the body of the young woman comes true in a symbolic way by "looking". Because of the excessive clarity of the day, the woman can open, on the man's request, her eyes so painfully that, a little opened, they resemble, to resume the word of Krapp, "slits". However, this "opening" of the body can get ready for penetration only when Krapp intercepts the sun and projects the shadow of his body on the body of the other. The two lovers finally regain the obscurity favorable to sexual relations; the "orifice of the body" is eventually well opened for "penetration": "[…] they [the eyes] opened. [*Pause. Low.*] Let me in."

Therefore, during this communion of the eyes, the first sign of their carnal union, Krapp's eyes work as a "phallus" which penetrates the "vagina" symbolized by the eyes, "just slits", of his lover. This double symbolic function of the "eyes" is clearly explained by Claude Bonnafont, quoted in *Dictionnaire des symboles* (*Dictionary of Symbols*), written by Nadia Julien:

> *Au plan du symbolisme sexuel, l'œil... organe du regard qui pénètre et prend possession... symbolise le membre viril... Le regard durcit: il darde et vise son objectif ; il s'y plante, le pénètre, le perce et le transperce ; il lance des flammes et des éclairs ; il fusille et foudroie. L'œil accomplit symboliquement tous les exploits de la balistique amoureuse*[9]. (Julien 1989: 253)

Next, the author of the dictionary adds another meaning to this ambivalent symbol: « Il symbolise également l'organe féminin: réceptif, il se laisse pénétrer par le regard de l'autre, le capte, le retient; il s'humecte, s'embue lorsqu'il verse des larmes[10] » (Julien 1989: 253).

Exchanging eyes in this erotic context is thus not merely a simple means of self-perception, but a necessary sexual act which will allow Krapp to rejoin his mother, as we will explain next.

The eroticism of this scene is further reinforced by the image of the "barge"

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[9] At the level of sexual symbolism, the eye... organ for looking that penetrates and takes possession... symbolizes the male organ... The look hardens: it darts and aims at its objective; it places itself there, penetrates it, pierces it and breaks through it; it launches flames and flashes; it shoots and strikes down. The eye symbolically accomplishes all the exploits of ballistics in love.

[10] It also symbolizes the female organ: receptive, it lets itself penetrated by the look of the other, obtains it, and withholds it; it moistens, mists up when it pours tears.

(matrix and female symbol) bedecked with "flags" of which the form and flexibility evoke inevitably the phallus, without mentioning the fact that the sword-shaped plant like the reed symbolizes as well "fertilization" according to Julien (Julien 1989: 337). These flags "went down, sighing, before the stem!" —an ideal image of the *sexual act* accompanied by the *voice of breath* (the second sign). This erotic scene is marked by the third sign of their carnal union, the *warmth of touch*: "I lay down across her with my face in her breasts and my hand on her."

Finally, the two lovers remain motionless in the barge, but the movement of "nice and lively" water (Beckett 1986: 221) marvellously simulates the *rhythmic sway*, the fourth sign, of the sexual act: "We lay there without moving. But under us all moved, and moved us, gently, up and down, and from side to side." Thus, with this travesty of the sensual yet maternal sway with the resemblance to the matrix form, the "barge" here is no different from a "cradle", and in this way links sexual love to maternal love, as reinforced by Bachelard:

> La barque oisive donne les mêmes délices, suscite les mêmes rêveries. Elle donne, dit Lamartine sans hésitation, « une des plus mystérieuses voluptés de la nature ». D'innombrables références littéraires nous prouveraient facilement que la barque enchanteresse, que la barque romantique est, à certains égards, un berceau reconquis. […] Le mouvement est là, vivant, sans heurt, rythmé – c'est le mouvement presque immobile, bien silencieux. L'eau nous porte. L'eau nous berce. L'eau nous endort. L'eau nous rend notre mère[11]. (Bachelard 1942: 178)

While breaking up with his lover, Krapp reestablishes on the other hand relations with his mother. Like any of the other Beckettian protagonists mentioned earlier, by recalling his good old days, he can momentarily escape the mental and physical suffering presented on stage into a dreamlike world where he can experience happiness. In addition, the memory of happiness of a couple doubly protected in the hollow of a boat (uterus), lulled gently by the water in soft movement (amniotic liquid), is a very recurrent image especially in the Beckettian plays of his earlier period.

In *Happy Days*, the evocation of Winnie's happy moments repeats the reminiscence of Krapp's past: "The sunshade you gave me... that day... [*Pause.*] ... that day... the lake... the reeds" (Beckett 1986: 162). The pieces of her memory of happiness recall the erotic elements in the love scene that we have just mentioned: the "lake", the "reeds" (sword-shaped like the flags), or even the idea of the "shadow" provided by the man, suggested by her words "The sunshade you gave me", as if it were a new version of Krapp's sensual story narrated from a woman's point of view. This escape dream instantly ends in a startled awakening: "[*Eyes front. Pause.*]

[11] The idle barge gives the same delights, arouses the same dreaminess. It gives, says Lamartine without hesitation, "one of the most mysterious exquisite delights of nature". Innumerable literary references prove easily that the enchanting barge or the romantic barge is, in certain respects, a cradle recovered. […] The movement is there, lively, smooth, rhythmic—it is quite motionless and silent movement. Water carries us away. Water lulls us. Water puts us to sleep. Water brings our mother back to us.

What day? [*Pause.*] What reeds? [*Long pause. Eyes close. Bell rings loudly. Eyes open.* […]" (Beckett 1986: 162) because of her very fuzzy memory or perhaps her fatigue in the intense sunlight, which reinforces the idea that she is a child rejected by her cruel mother who does not allow her a reunion.

All the same, M in *Play*, consumed continually by the overwhelming light of the projector, evokes a dream, otherwise a vague souvenir, of boarding a boat on a river with his lovers: "A little dinghy, on the river, I resting on my oars, they lolling on air-pillows in the stern . . . sheets. Drifting. Such fantasies" (Beckett 1986: 316).

Here once again, sensual love is linked closely to maternal love by "water", the archetype of femininity and sexuality. The scene of happiness is still in a boat on water—the same image of double maternal protection (uterus and uterine liquid). The dream of water here not only refreshes literally the body burnt by the infernal glimmer, but also brings it back symbolically in the shadow of the maternal womb, where the one who is "[d]ying for dark" (Beckett 1986: 317) can return to a resting sleep state.

In consequence, for stillborn beings who prefer a relaxing sleep to a tiring waking, it is the darkness associated with the physical and spiritual break that they desire fervently every instant of life.

II. The Body and Saving Obscurity

Associated with the "night" or "death", the dark marks an opportune moment for dreams, rest, either provisional or eternal, and ultimately a return to the state of unconsciousness, of not-being, of obscurity, in a word, to the "intrauterine" state that the Beckett's born-exhausted beings aim at zealously.

2.1 Night or Obscurity

Light, which symbolizes life and birth, is represented as noxious, physically and morally, and even malicious towards the stillborn beings whose life is unthinkable. The search for obscurity eventually results, in certain cases, in the "luminophobia" which becomes evident very early since *Eleutheria*. During the discussion in the salon of the Kraps, Mrs. Piouk complains about the unbearable light of the lamp:

> **Mme Piouk** How horrible this light is!
> **Mlle Skunk** You aren't in it any more, though.
> **Mme Piouk** No, but now I can see it.
> **Mlle Skunk** What's this barbed wire for? (*She points to a thin strip of barbed wire fixed under the edge of the table and running down to the floor.*)
> **Mme Piouk** Barbed wire?
> **Mlle Skunk** (*touching it*) It's got spikes! Look!
> *Mme Piouk stands up and leans over the table.*
> **Mme Piouk** How is it that I hadn't noticed it?
> **Dr Piouk** My wife is not very sensitive to the macrocosm.
> **M. Krap** But she reacted to the light.
> **Dr Piouk** That's because she really suffered from it. (Beckett 1996: 40)

M. Krap, in turn, eventually tired of his pretense at living, asks his servant to

extinguish "this abominable light" (Beckett 1996: 64) of the floor lamp. Jacques does it on the order of his master, while leaving the wall lamp on, as a sign that the light is never wholly extinguished in this salon as long as the "actor" does not renounce his role to live. For his son, Victor, who turns his back on the world, one of his mundane rites is breaking the bulb and assuming a foetal position in obscurity.

Next, in *Waiting for Godot* in which the day seems permanent and the night suspended, a question that haunts the spirit of Vladimir and Estragon is "Will night never come?" (Beckett 1986: 35) During this apparently hopeless wait, the grave of the night has the same value as the arrival of Godot:

> VLADIMIR: […] in this immense confusion one thing alone is clear. We are waiting for Godot to come—
> […]
> VLADIMIR: Or for night to fall. (Beckett 1986: 74)

Always welcomed by born-exhausted children, the night or darkness interrupts, at least momentarily, the waiting or the pain and anguish of life, as shown in an undeniable manner by Krapp in *Krapp's Last Tape*, who prefers one light bulb rather than the light that illuminates the whole room, or by Winnie in *Happy Days* and especially by the three "jarres parlantes" (speaking jars) (Janvier 1966: 239) in *Play*, to borrow the word of Ludovic Janvier, who are lamentably exposed to the intense light and long for the irresistible dark.

The night or obscurity not only brings a temporary rest, a return to the shadows as the state in the maternal womb, but also marks a moment favorable to dreaming, to rejoining the mother. Notably in a television play *Nacht und träume* (*Night and Dream*), A (Dreamer) dreams of himself, B (dreamt self), caressed tenderly by L (dreamt hand left) and well nourished by R (dreamt hand right):

> 7. From dark beyond and above B's head L appears and rests gently on it.
> 8. B raises his head, L withdraws and disappears.
> 9. From same dark R appears with a cup, conveys it gently to B's lips. B drinks, R disappears.
> 10. R reappears with a cloth, wipes gently B's brow, disappears with cloth. (Beckett 1992: 465)

With affection and very maternal solicitude, the two dreamt hands probably belong to the absent mother. Nevertheless, it is a double-faced mother, both benevolent and cruel, a mother who attracts and rejects her child at the same time:

> 11. B raises his head further to gaze up at invisible face.
> 12. B raises his hand, still gazing up, and holds it raised palm upward.
> 13. R reappears and rests gently on B's right hand, B still gazing up.
> 14. B transfers gaze to joined hands.
> 15. B raises his left hand and rests it on joined hands.
> 16. Together hands sink to table and on them B's head.
> 17. L reappears and rests gently on B's head. (Beckett 1992: 466)

While expressing her ostensible maternal love, this mother impedes, on the other

hand, a true reunion with her: neither communion of the eyes (numbers 8 and 11) nor bodily contact (number 16) is allowed. What is the difference then between this appealing, villainous mother and the tormenting stimuli in *Act without Words I*, which incessantly awaken the attention of the man without giving him any satisfaction? The play ends with the recommencement of the same series of dreams but in "slower motion" (Beckett 1992: 466), just like all the Beckettian plays of the last period in which everything is repetitive and doomed to silence and inertia.

Nevertheless, until the end arrives, the "(re)conciliation" with the mother in this obscurity of night is at least all that the aborted children can hope for in order to appease, in the interim, their regret of having been born. Whether waiting for mother or for death, there is no other way, it seems, but to take the habitual posture of a foetus in the womb. In the short dramatic work that we have just analyzed, A (Dreamer) is seated at the table, "head bowed […] hands resting on table" (Beckett 1992: 465). In addition, the author specifies next that "Clearly visible only head and hands and section of table on which they rest" (Beckett 1992: 465). In other words, he bends in the shadow without the setting being seen distinctly—is it not a foetal attitude? Gilles Deleuze considers this "seated posture" as that of an "exhausted" being, also reinforcing in an implicit way our idea that this is the position of a foetus in the womb:

> C'est la plus horrible position d'attendre la mort assis sans pouvoir se lever ni se coucher, guettant le coup qui nous fera nous dresser une dernière fois et nous coucher pour toujours. Assis, on n'en revient pas, on ne peut plus remuer même un souvenir. La berceuse est encore imparfaite à cet égard, ce qu'il faut, c'est qu'elle s'arrête. On devrait peut-être distinguer l'œuvre couché de Beckett, et l'œuvre assis, seul ultime. C'est que, entre l'épuisement assis et la fatigue couchée, rampante ou plantée, il y a une différence de nature. La fatigue affecte l'action dans tous ses états, tandis que l'épuisement concerne seulement le témoin amnésique. L'assis est le témoin autour duquel l'autre tourne en développant tous les degrés de fatigue. Il est là avant de naître, et avant que l'autre commence[12]. (Beckett 1992: 64-65)

In … *but the clouds…*, it is always in a foetal posture that M awaits in vain every night the appearance of his dead mother: a "man sitting on invisible stool, bowed over invisible table" (Beckett 1992: 417). This return to the intrauterine state or this expectation of a reunion with his mother happens each night:

[12] It is the most horrible position: to await death sitting without being able to get up or to lie down, while looking for a chance that will make us get upright a last time and lie down forever. Seated, one does not get out of that state; one cannot stir even a memory anymore. The rocking chair is still imperfect in this respect, what is necessary is that it stops. One may distinguish the work of Beckett as lying and sitting. It is that, between the seated exhaustion and lying, crawling, or immobile fatigue, there is a difference of nature. Fatigue affects the action in all its states, while exhaustion concerns only the amnesiac witness. The seated is the witness around whom the other turns while developing all the degrees of fatigue. It is there before being born and before the other begins.

> 3. V: [M's voice] When I thought of her it was always night. I came in —
> […]
> 7. V: No, that is not right. When she appeared it was always night. I came in —
> […]
> 21. V: Then crouching there, in my little sanctum, in the dark, where none could see me, I began to beg, of her, to appear, to me. Such had long been my use and wont. No sound, a begging of the mind, to her, to appear, to me. Deep down into the dead of night, until I wearied, and ceased. Or of course until—
> (Beckett 1992: 420)

In the thick, silent night, he patiently awaits an indifferent mother who will never return. Here again is a child rejected by his mother who refuses to speak or even to look at him. It is only an unattainable dream, nothing else "... but the clouds of the sky... when the horizon fades... or a bird's sleepy cry... among the deepening shade..." (Beckett 1992: 422).

It is always the abandoned child who is obsessed with the mother. Unfortunately, he is not the only one: F (Male figure) in *Ghost Trio*, also, confronts the same fate. "F is seated on a stool, bowed forward, face hidden, clutching with both hands a small cassette not identifiable as such at this range" (Beckett 1992: 409). F, who awaits fruitlessly in the grayness the arrival of a woman, also takes the attitude of a foetus in the womb. This supposed dead woman whose age we do not know can be his lover, but is more probably his mother, considering his seated position.

On the one hand, the cassette, held tightly and constantly in the arms, here takes a role less erotic than maternal. Before going further, first, we owe the origin of this idea to Paul Lawley, who makes a very interesting remark on the function of this machine in *Krapp's Last Tape*:

> And this is where the irony lies. For as we listen to this taped moment, what we see amounts to a near-parody of the scene. 'Lie down across her' (*CSPL*, 63), Krapp instructs himself as he replays the episode, and in his pool of light he bends over the tape-machine, his hand on it. 'Become as much as possible one with the machine', Beckett advised the actor Pierre Chabert. It is a poignant instruction. For the broken Krapp his machine, with its reassuring bulk and its twin revolving spools, has become a maternal-erotic substitute ('Spooool!' (*CSPL,* 56) coos Krapp early in the play, with a sucking infantile relish). (Lawley 1994: 93)

Similarly to Krapp, F ordinarily bends in a foetal posture on his cassette, evoking thus by its two spools a female and maternal image. He puts this machine down on the stool only when, on the order of a female voice in his head, he moves to the door and the window to look for the woman who will never come and to the pallet to see the "mirror reflecting nothing" (Beckett 1992: 413) but the emptiness of the looker[13]. After the series of these vain movements (Act II[14]), he returns at last to

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[13] This stage direction reminds us of the speech of Winnie in *Happy Days*: "Take my looking-glass, it doesn't need me." (162).

[14] This piece in a single act is composed of three ("trio") Acts: Act I, F in initial posture (bending himself as a foetus on the cassette);

the initial position: "*F straightens up, releases door which closes slowly of itself, stands irresolute, goes to stool, takes up cassette, sits irresolute, settles finally into opening pose, bowed over cassette.* (Beckett 1992: 411)

Like a child oscillating between the need to see his mother again and the fear of being rejected, F continues to hope until a messenger boy, wet with rain, arrives to give him a sign that the woman will not come this night. F resumes the same foetal posture, but this time "*head bowed right down over cassette now held in arms and invisible*" (Beckett 1992: 414). Here the cassette that he clutches becomes a substitute for the absent mother.

On the other hand, at the end of Act II, after F does not see his mother anywhere and comes back to the stool to resume his initial pose, and at the end of Act III, after he realizes that she will not come this night, the music to accompany this foetal attitude suddenly becomes audible, weakly in the first case (Beckett 1992: 411) and strongly in the second (Beckett 1992: 414), as if it were a lullaby to calm the abandoned child, nonetheless reunited temporarily to the symbolic mother thanks to the two mediators: the cassette and the maternal song.

When all is said and done, these stillborn beings return to the dark where they were before their birth. Whether the mother comes or not, the darkness always appeases their suffering and gives them new hope to reconcile with the mother. Besides the night or obscurity, it is also in death, represented as beneficial, that the aborted children have a chance to rejoin their mothers.

2.2 Death – Synonym of Deliverance

The darkness to which the Beckett's stillborn children aspire constantly is associated symbolically with death, as asserted by Jean Chevalier: « Le noir exprime la passivité absolue, l'état de mort accomplie et invariante[15] » (Chevalier 1969: 711) Additionally, according to Eliade, death or « les ténèbres expriment toujours la dissolution des formes, le retour au stade séminale de l'existence[16] » (Eliade 1977: 161). Julien associates in the same manner "death" with "rebirth": « La mort-anéantissement a toujours été liée au recommencement, à l'évolution. Ce qui relie le symbolisme de la mort à celui de la mère et explique la position du fœtus donnée aux cadavres à l'époque préhistorique, dans l'attente de la renaissance, d'un nouveau départ pour la vie[17]» (Julien 1989: 231).

Death is thus experienced symbolically by Beckett's prematurely-born children as the dissolution of the body and at the same

Act II, the comings and goings of F to the door, to the window, and to the pallet and his return to the stool to resume the fetal attitude of the beginning, again with the cassette between the arms; Act III, the arrival of the messenger boy and the return of F once more to put himself back in initial position, while holding the cassette more tightly this time.

[15] Darkness expresses absolute passivity, the accomplished and invariant death state.

[16] Darkness always expresses the dissolution of forms, the return to the seminal stage of existence.

[17] The annihilation-death was always linked to recommencement, to evolution, which links up the symbolism of death to that of the mother and explains the fetal position given to corpses in the prehistoric era, while waiting for the rebirth, for a new departure for life.

time, as a return to the maternal womb, to the state before the beginning of life, or in certain cases as a second birth. For this reason, death in the theatrical universe of Beckett is not represented as fearful, painful, or demeaning, but as welcoming, serene, and especially beneficial.

As early as the first play, *Eleutheria*, this proclivity for death appears very manifest, particularly for M. Krap, who insists obviously that "[l]ife isn't possible" (Beckett 1996: 51). The suffering of life can often incite the Beckettian protagonists to commit suicide; even so, this means that attaining the desired death will never be achieved, "either from decency or from cowardice, or precisely because he doesn't live" (Beckett 1996: 52), according to M. Krap. As mentioned earlier, it is only the empty body that came into the world, the stillborn being who can only "pretend to live, and that other people live" (Beckett 1996: 52).

Now, if psychologically the Beckett's stillborn children "do not live", how can they then die or commit suicide? If they act as if they lived to put a provisional end to suffering, it is likewise necessary for them to act as if they died by creating conditions analogous to death or by committing suicide in the imagination. While awaiting physical death (and also hypothetical death since one will never know if the final end will actually arrive in the Beckettian universe of chaos—a true space of uncertainty), one can, therefore, only dream of death or suicide which does not surpass his capacity, specially dream of a death associated with the mother, a death which will bring him back momentarily to the non-life state, or more precisely the intrauterine state.

M. Krap wishes for a beneficent death in one of his "favourite places" (Beckett 1996: 41), his armchair, whose form and comfortable, warm, protective, and consoling nature recall the maternal matrix:

> **Dr Piouk** Are you ill?
> **M. Krap** I'm dying.
> **Mme Meck** Really Henri, do calm down.
> **M. Krap** And I certainly don't expect to astonish anyone…
> **Mme Meck** Henri!
> **M. Krap** … When I sit bolt upright…
> […]
> **M. Krap** … and they see I've shot my bolt. Ha ha! (Beckett 1996: 27-28)

Futhermore, whenever M. Krap assumes the foetal position in this maternal womb substitute, he lives a caricature of death while entering a state of non-life, of sleep, or of unconsciousness. In consequence, every going out of the armchair symbolizes for him a new birth and that explains why getting up never seems easy for him:

> **M. Krap** […] Help me to resuscitate.
> *Jacques hurries over, helps M Krap up, wants to assists him to the door. M. Krap waves him away. At the door, he turns round.*
> You see: once I'm on my feet I can walk by myself! I'm going out!
> *He goes out. He comes in again.*
> I'm coming in again! And I'm going out again!
> *He goes out again, followed by Jacques*. (Beckett 1996: 35-36)

The sentences of M. Krap are thus symbolic: as soon as he leaves his

armchair, he revives ("resuscitate"); he can "go out" of the symbolic maternal womb to live, and once exhausted, he can "come in again" to take a rest before "going out again" to continue to live until the physical death actually arrives. At the end of Act I, M. Krap places himself as usual in his armchair, all alone, silent, and motionless in the very weakly lightened salon—a perfect image of a return to the intrauterine state:

> **M. Krap** Good night.
> *Jacques starts to go out.*
> Leave the doors open.
> **Jacques** Very good, monsieur.
> **M. Krap** So that you can hear my cries.
> **Jacques** Very good, mons... I beg your pardon, monsieur?
> **M. Krap** Leave them open.
> **Jacques** Very good, monsieur. (*Exit, worried.*)
> *M. Krap motionless.*
> **M. Krap** Curtain.
> *M. Krap motionless.*
> CURTAIN (Beckett 1996: 65)

M. Krap will pull down the "curtain" of his life off-scene, indeed in his armchair (Beckett 1996: 78) (according to Mrs. Meck)—the "cries", the silence, and at last the darkness remind us of the end or the return to the maternal womb in *Breath*, except that M. Krap no longer comes in "to go out again". Now, among all Beckettian characters, M. Krap is the only one[18] whose dream of dying finally comes true. The others, who also regret having been born, are only able to wait indefinitely, it seems, an end that will never come.

Moreover, the desire for death in Beckett's stillborn beings is associated most frequently with water, especially salt water, the psychological valorization of which allows for a equation with the Sea-Mother. As mentioned earlier, the sea symbolizes, by its negative face, death or the infamous mother; but death in water or drowning can bring us back by the same token to the prenatal state, to the state of a foetus bathing in uterine liquid, as affirmed by Gilbert Durand:

> La primordiale et suprême avaleuse est bien la mer […] l'abyssus féminisé et maternel qui pour de nombreuses cultures est l'archétype de la descente et du retour aux sources originelles du bonheur[19]. (Durand 1992: 256)

Water carries an ambivalent image, that of birth and death at the same time. The drowned finds a maternal envelope, consoling and allowing him to "re-engender"; suicide by drowning, as welcoming and beneficent death, is consequently a recurrent dream and fantasy among Beckett's stillborn beings.

First, for Hamm in *Endgame*, his aquatic escape in the imagination is sometimes associated visibly with death, indeed with suicide in the sea:

> HAMM: […] If I could drag myself down to the sea! I'd make a pillow of sand for my head and the tide would come. (Beckett 1986: 122)

[18] We exclude evidently the still doubtful death of Nell in *Endgame*.

[19] The essential and supreme swallower is the sea […] the female and maternal abyss which for many cultures is the archetype of the descent and return to the original sources of happiness.

Next, in *Cascando*, in which Opener unceasingly "opens" Voice and Music in his head, Voice relates, with the accompaniment of Music, the life of Woburn, who wanders in the night to look for a "sure place" to sleep:

> VOICE: — […] he goes on... he goes down... come on... in his head... what's in his head... a hole… a shelter... a hollow... in the dunes... a cave... vague memory... in his head... of a cave... (Beckett 1986: 298)

The wandering of this fictitious personage shows signs of nostalgia for the mother that Opener (of his storyteller voice) carries in him and his effort to return to the maternal womb, evoked by the uninterrupted search for a dark and protective cavity for sleep. Nevertheless, this attempt to find an appropriate place ends in failure, and the story of Woburn culminates in a departure by boat out to sea that is no different from a suicide:

> VOICE: — no tiller... no thwarts... no oars... afloat... sucked out... then back... aground... drags free... out... Woburn... he fills it... flat out... face in the bilge... arms spread... same old coat... hands clutching... the gunnels... no... I don't know... I see him... he clings on... out to sea... heading nowhere... for the island... then no more... else —
> […]
> VOICE: — come on... Woburn... arms spread... same old coat... face in the bilge... he clings on... island gone... far astern... heading out... open sea... land gone... his head... what's in his head... Woburn — (Beckett 1986: 301-302)

The death of Woburn appears imminent but not inevitable for the play ends without our knowing the true ending. In fact, what really counts is the act of "narrating", indeed "opening": like Winnie in *Happy Days* ("I can do no more. [*Pause.*] Say no more. [*Pause.*] But I must say more.") (Beckett 1986: 166); for Opener, to stop opening means to accept death ("I'm afraid to open. But I must open. So I open") (Beckett 1986: 302). Despite his apparent effort to continue, Opener chooses to "finish" the story with the probable death of Woburn, inducing possibly his own (since he will no longer have anything to open), which implies us that he actually desires to end his life. And it is death by boat that he imagines, a death that signals his nostalgia for the mother and his craving to re-engender in the doubly protective envelopment of the matrix (boat) and uterine liquid (sea).

In addition, in *Eh Joe*, Joe's only passion is "throttling the dead in his head" (Beckett 1986: 363). Joe imagines, from the beginning to the end of the play, the voice of his lover that he will "kill" by several means in water:

> Down the garden and under the viaduct... Sees from the seaweed the tide is flowing... Goes on down to the edge and lies down with her face in the wash... Cut a long story short doesn't work... Gets up in the end sopping wet and back up to the house... Gets out the Gillette... […] Back down the garden and under the viaduct... Takes the blade from holder and lies down at the edge on her side... Cut another long story short doesn't work either... […] Gets up in the end and back up to the house... […] Gets the tablets and back down the garden and under the

> viaduct... Takes a few on the way... […] Moon going off the shore behind the hill... Stands a bit looking at the beaten silver... […] Trailing her feet in the water like a child... Takes a few more on the way... Will I go on, Joe?... Eh Joe?... Lies down in the end with her face a few feet from the tide... (Beckett 1986: 365-366)

We cannot know if the suicide of his lover is imaginary or real. Nevertheless, what is sure is that this death in water haunts Joe and returns untiringly in his head, which reveals in a way his yearning for a similar death.

Finally, dreams or a desire for death can culminate in a suicide attempt; nonetheless, the stillborn beings, condemned to suffer, never actually manage to kill themselves. Furthermore, as quoted at the beginning of this section, the death for the Beckettian characters is symbolically experienced not only as a return to the prenatal state in the uterus, but also, in certain cases, as a new birth. It is interesting to note that it is often nostalgia for the mother or the craving to re-engender and to be reborn that arouses them to take this decision. The wish to be reborn is doubtless to stop the suffering of the present life; it also reflects their last desperate endeavor to experience a new life, a better one, which seemingly and unfortunately turns out to be impossible.

Particularly, in *Rough of Theatre II*, C (Mr. Croker[20]) in the course of suicide calls for A (Bertrand) and B (Morven) to decide if he should carry out this fatal gesture. While C remains motionless and silent in front of the window, the two participants read depositions from witnesses who have known C, using the weak light of a bulb that itself risks being extinguished. They discuss the issue and "conclude," at least for the time being, "[l]et him jump" (Beckett 1986: 238).

This desire of C to commit suicide is marked by several signs of nostalgia for the mother and the craving to re-engender and to be reborn. First, the suicide place is a warm, protective, dark room (for lack of electricity and in the middle of the night) with "high double window open on bright night sky" (Beckett 1986: 237)—a perfect image of the matrix with an orifice (vagina) open on the world or the light of day. Normally, C lives on a "barge" — once more an evocation, by its hollow form, of the maternal nostalgia and the uterine substitute; however, he comes in this room to take care of the cat each month and this month, moreover, to commit suicide (Beckett 1986: 239). Now, if the barge and the room both symbolize the matrix, why does he choose the latter as a suicide place? ... It is because this room with a window corresponds most clearly to his desire to be reborn. His envisaged means of suicide— to "fall from the window"—implicitly symbolizes the "delivery", in other words, getting out of the uterus to see the world.

In addition, throughout the play, A and B worry from time to time about the source of light outside the window (Moon, Jupiter, or Sirius?). Their conversation reveals that they await in fact the full moon that will mark the end of their mission just as the end of C's life, if they are for his suicide:

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[20] This name already signals the "morose sadness" that ironically marks its carrier—a word pun between "Mr. Croker" and "to croak" which means "to die"; the latter name actually appears in a later radio piece, *Words and Music*.

[*Pause.*] *A gets up, goes to the window, leans out, looks down. He straightens up, looks at the sky. Pause. He goes back to his seat.*]
A: Full moon.
B: Not quite. Tomorrow.
[*A takes a little diary from his pocket.*]
A: What's the date?
B: Twenty-fourth. Twenty-fifth tomorrow.
A: [*Turning pages.*] Nineteen ... twenty-two ... twenty-four. [*Reads.*] 'Our Lady of Succour. Full moon.' [*He puts back the diary in his pocket.*] We were saying then ... what was it... let him jump. Our conclusion. Right? (Beckett 1986: 238)

The date fixed for the suicide and the final decision of the two judges is the day of "Our Lady of Succour". The word "Our Lady" generally evokes the image of Mary, the Mother of the Child Jesus, the day favorable, it seems, for the reunion of this stillborn child with his mother. The importance of the full moon is, more to the point, highlighted several times, which implies that its meaning could surpass the simple precision of the hour of the suicidal act. Symbolically, the "Moon" is, according to Julien, a female and maternal symbol, a renewal symbol (renaissance) because of its periodic reappearance (Julien 1989: 201-203). Its growth is associated by analogy with the vital cycle of living beings:

> Ses *phases* correspondent aux périodes du développement de la **vie féminine**.
> La *nouvelle lune* est le symbole de l'**enfance** ; la *lune croissante*, celui de la jeunesse, de l'adolescence, de la **réceptivité universelle** et **indifférenciée** qui attire tout à soi, des pulsions infantiles, de l'attachement à la mère, des traditions ; elle correspond au type **extraverti**.
> La *pleine lune* correspond à la **maturité**, la grossesse, l'enfantement.
> La *lune décroissante*, hémisphère gauche de l'astre illuminé, symbolise le **déclin de la vie** et représente le type **introverti**, dirigé vers la vie intérieure, le sommeil, le pressentiment, la fantaisie, l'inconscient collectif où bouillonnent les archétypes de l'humanité[21]. (Julien 1989: 203-204)

From this perspective, the full moon marks a timely moment for C to commit suicide, or again, to re-engender and be reborn. However, the author specifies in his stage direction that despite the clarity of the night, the moon is invisible: "Moon invisible" (Beckett 1986: 237). This is also probably the reason why A and B look in vain for the source of the night light. It

[21] Its *phases* correspond to the periods of development of **female life**.
The *new moon* is the symbol of **childhood**; the *ascending moon*, symbol of youth, adolescence, **universal** and **indistinct receptiveness** which attracts all to itself, infantile drives, devotion to the mother, traditions; it corresponds to the **extroverted** type.
The *full moon* corresponds to **maturity**, pregnancy, childbirth.
The *descending moon*, left hemisphere of the illuminated star, symbolizes the **decline of life** and represents the **introverted** type, directed towards internal life, sleep, the premonition, the fantasy, the collective unconsciousness where the archetypes of humanity seethe.

appears that the two extras return here every night and that they impatiently await the appearance of the full moon, while envisioning their projects after the end of this wait. Is this another version of *Waiting for Godot*, and "[s]o the sad tale a last time told[22]?" We never know if the full moon will appear tomorrow or if they mistook the day like other Beckettian "amnesiacs". The play ends before the desire for death or the suicide attempt is completed, leaving us to wonder if the fatal gesture is actually feasible.

Death, even seen as beneficial, is often inaccessible. While awaiting its arrival, the born-tired children, mainly in the last short plays, seek a shelter where they can live calmly in solitude.

III. Isolated Body and Introverted World

The Beckett's stillborn beings, especially in the plays of the last period, separate themselves from the outside world most frequently to curl up in a world void of excitement, a world of silence, out of sight, and tranquil as in the maternal womb.

Their spiritual ancestor is the misanthropist Victor in the first play *Eleutheria* who uniformly snuggles up in his bed, takes refuge in sleep like a foetus that withdraws from the out-of-uterine life. If, for these empty bodies, "[t]he mistake is to want to live" for "[t]here is nothing to live on in the life we have been lent" (Beckett 1996: 51), as M. Krap's complains, his son chooses a good way. At the end of Act III, Dr Piouk, philosopher and advocate of euthanasia, proposes that Victor choose between coming back to life again or returning to live among his fellow-creature and taking the poisoned tablet to attain long desired death. Victor, who wants "to see oneself dead" (Beckett 1996: 150) in order to enjoy it, will refuse the two choices while insisting on remaining in this "semi-living" state, just as he declared to the Spectator who had proposed his execution by the Chinese torturer (death):

> **Victor** The kind of life I lead? It's the life of someone who doesn't want to lead your kind of life – oh, I'm not talking about yours in particular, no one would want that, but of the life that is yours in the sense that there's only a difference of degree between you and what they call it real living beings. (Beckett 1996: 146)

It is at the average "degree", between life and death, in conditions analogous to those in the maternal womb, that Victor chooses to live. The glazier has, therefore, reason to swear at the Spectator "Abortionist!" (Beckett 1996: 153) while chasing him towards the wings. If addressed to Dr Piouk who forbids, in reality, the reproduction, this insult can have a denotative meaning; however, here the Spectator becomes an "abortionist"[23] in the sense that he symbolically removes Victor from the maternal womb before term, while forcing him to leave his sleep in the room which is a priori protective, dark, silent and out of sight ("matrix" thus by its form and its characteristics).

[22] This quote is from a passage before the end of *Ohio Impromptu*. (447)

[23] The author's word choice perfectly implies the fetal state of Victor in the uterus.

From this point of view, every day when the glazier comes to awaken Victor (notably in Act III), he also is no different from an "abortionist". It is probably for this reason that he gives all his tools to Victor at the end of the play—a sign that he no longer returns to assume this function of "glazier" or "abortionist". Victor can remain here and now individually in this introverted world, at least for the moment until he has no means to pay the rent or his family changes ideas again, for example. He declares finally, so to speak, his "victory", as foreshadowed by his name "Victor", over the Kraps (craps)[24]:

> *Victor sitting on the bed. He looks at the bed, the room, the window, the door. He stands up and starts pushing his bed to the back of the room, as far as possible from the door and the window, that's to say towards the footlights on the side of the spectator's box. He finds it very difficult. He pushes and pulls, with pauses to rest, sitting on the edge of the bed. It's obvious that he isn't very strong. He finally makes it. He sits down on the bed, which is now parallel to the footlights. After a moment he stands up, goes over to the switch, turns the light off, looks out of the window, goes and sits on the bed again, facing the audience, scrutinises the audience, the stalls, the balconies (if there are any), to the right, to the left. Then he lies down, turning his emaciated back on humanity.* (Beckett 1996: 170)

If the room here becomes a symbol of the uterus where the foetus Victor serenely lodges, in order to improve the conditions suited for that, it is necessary to block all its openings—door and window, symbols of the orifices of the body, according to Freud (Freud 2005: 187), that can lead to delivery or an abortion.

In most of the plays of the last period, the stillborn beings find their refuge similarly in a room, a world apart, a warm, dark, and silent place where they can remain tranquil in a prenatal state, and frequently in a foetal position. Even when the scenic space is practically empty or hidden in dimness, there often remains as the setting a pallet or a bed and the born-exhausted children most often dressed in peignoir or dressing gown, evoking thus the image of a room, as an intimate and protective space symbolizing the womb.

Notably in *Eh Joe* where the beginning repeats the end of *Eleutheria*, Joe can relax, if only for a short time, only after blocking all the openings of his room: window, door, and even cupboard, before sitting on the bed, here again in a foetal position, to stay at last with the voice of a woman in his head:

> Thought of everything? ... Forgotten nothing? ... You're all right now, eh? ... No one can see you now.... No one can get at you now.... Why don't you put out that light? ... There might be a louse watching you... Why don't you go to bed? ... What's wrong with that bed, Joe? ... You changed it, didn't you? ... Made no difference? ... Or is the heart

[24] From a technical standpoint, "there is no marginal action to the third act, as the Krap side has fallen into the orchestra pit during the change of the scene", according to the stage direction of Beckett (6). As for us, at an interpretative level, this disappearance of the Krap side also symbolizes a declaration of Victor's victory over his family.

> already? ... Crumbles when you lie down in the dark.... Dry rotten at last... Eh Joe? (Beckett 1986: 362)

In the same manner, O in *Film* flees the sight of other people in the street to confine himself in a room, that of his mother moreover, according to note no. 9 of the author himself at the end of the play: "It may be supposed it is his mother's room, which he has not visited for many years and is now to occupy momentarily, to look after the pets, until she comes out of hospital" (Beckett 1986: 332).

In the shelter of this matrix (room), O prepares his introverted world by blocking all its openings and eliminating any foreign perception before falling asleep in the rocking chair of his mother—a double protection by another enveloping matrix. During this effort to suppress perception, an important act is to destroy the print representing God the Father who fixes "severely" on him:

> He returns to briefcase, picks it up, goes to chair, sits down and is opening case when disturbed by print, pinned to wall before him, of the face of God the Father, the eyes staring at him severely. He sets down case on floor to his left, gets up and inspects print. Insistent image of wall, paper hanging off in strips ([note] 10). He tears print from wall, tears it in four, throws down the pieces and grinds them underfoot. He turns back to chair […] (Beckett 1986: 327)

It goes without saying that "God the Father" is, from the psychoanalytic point of view, a symbol of the "father", and equally, a psychological representative of the "law" and the "penalty". The destruction of the father image here translates obviously as his desire for patricide, to eliminate the guilt of this incest, or the carnal reunion with his mother, symbolized by the rocking chair: O will at last sit, "rocking slightly, hands holding armrests" (Beckett 1986: 328) before falling asleep. The protection of the rocking chair not only evokes the image of the uterus where the foetus lodges, but also the arms lulling the newborn, which ensures in a way the tenderness and maternal love which fleetingly calms his nostalgia for the mother.

It is the same for R (Reader) in *Ohio Impromptu*, who constantly searches for the maternal embrace. First, the story of his life dates back to the day when he makes a decision to live in solitude: "In a last attempt to obtain relief he moved from where he had been so long together to a single room on the far bank. From its single window he could see the downstream extremity of the Isle of Swans" (Beckett 1986: 445).

In the night, R bends in front of the table to read the story of his life to his doubled body L (Listener); in the day, in spite of his hope to move away from the world, he traverses the island as if his mother always called him to return to her arms, symbolized by the "two arms" of the "water":

> Day after day he could be seen slowly pacing the islet. Hour after hour. In his long black coat no matter what the weather and old world Latin Quarter hat. At the tip he would always pause to dwell on the receding stream. How in joyous eddies its two arms conflowed and flowed united on. Then turn and his

slow steps retrace. (Beckett 1986: 446)

Julien sees the "island" as having a deeper symbolic significance: "Havre de paix, éloignée de la foule et de l'agitation des villes, l'île symbolise l'idéal, les aspirations, les désirs inaccessibles comme l'Atlantide, paradis perdu dont chacun porte en soi la nostalgie inconsciente[25]" (Julien 1989: 167).

Hence, the island is symbolically an ideal place to reunite with the absent mother, the "lost paradise" of the stillborn being. While placing himself on this island, R is between the arms of water which symbolize the maternal embrace.

At last, nostalgia for the mother becomes more remarkable than ever in *Rockaby*, in which the image of W seated in the rocking chair reminds us of O at the end of *Film*. After spending many years looking for "famished eyes like hers to see [and] be seen" (Beckett 1986: 439), W eventually ends by letting herself be lulled by a matrix substitute and her recorded voice (V) in an introverted world out of any possible perception:

V: let down the blind and down
right down
into the old rocker
mother rocker
where mother rocked
all the years
all in black
best black
sat and rocked
rocked
till her end came
in the end came
[…]
dead one day
no
night
dead one night
in the rocker
[…]
into the old rocker
those arms at last
and rocked
rocked
with closed eyes
closing eyes
[…]
the rocker
those arms at last
saying to the rocker
rock her off
stop her eyes
fuck life
stop her eyes
rock her off
rock her off (Beckett 1986: 440-442)

This excerpt summarizes our ideas and concludes the destiny of Beckett's stillborn children who allow themselves, after a long wait, to be carried away by nostalgia for the mother, and once in a while or definitively to escape into a dark, introverted, and protected world, where their bodies can curl up like foetuses in the womb.

Conclusion

Stuck in a life which seems entirely intolerable, the Beckett's protagonists constantly long for death or sometimes desperately figure out a way to commit suicide. Unfortunately, as if they were comdemned to suffer eternally, this desire to

[25] Harbour of peace, away from the crowd and agitation of the cities, the island symbolizes the ideal, aspirations, inaccessible desires like Atlantis, the lost paradise of which each person carries in oneself unconscious nostalgia.

end their life is never satisfied and even appears to be too fatiguing, particularly for the characters in the last plays. These born-exhausted beings deliberately turn introvert, waiting for physical death to come. In this state of agony, no less moral than physical, that the Beckettian characters must bear, a symbolic and metaphorical body and space—a foetus in the uterus—allow them to briefly escape from this malediction of existence. Nostalgia for the mother that these stillborn children carry within them calls them to create or to live in conditions analogous to those in the womb: a dark, and protective world absent of excitements, where their idle bodies can peacefully curl up in an intermediary state of non-life and non-death—their happiness and peace ephemeral but evidently not futile.

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